

## BSAC Jubilee Trust

### HMS Cobra

Shipwrecks of the River Humber found this vessel on 16 September 2021 in two parts, two point five miles apart after searching for her since 1997.

Fate must have been in play with us on that day as it was 120 years less two days, to the day it sank with the loss of sixty-four men. This ship has lain undiscovered for nearly one hundred and twenty years. HMS Cobra was one of only two specially designed, new steam turbine powered torpedo boat destroyers, built by Messrs Armstrong, Whitworth & Co Newcastle. She was a stock-ship' (These were ships built then offered to the Royal navy first) in June 1899, she was the very first steam turbine ship built, and was the design that all steam turbine ships built in the twentieth century were based on. In July 1899, when Armstrong's torpedo boat stock number 674 was lying in dock, she was in collision with collier and the damage took four months to repair. In December 1899, Armstrong's offered the vessel to the Admiralty. After inspection by the Admiralty' Assistant Constructor found her to be structurally below RN standards, but after prolonged negotiations she was purchased by the Royal Navy for £63,500, (this would be £22 million today). The Admiralty Board members were very unhappy. Prince Louis of Battenberg commented "As the case now stands, Their Lordships possess a destroyer of unprecedented speed which however she apparently will never be able to realise as the necessary personnel cannot be accommodated." After lengthy debate the accommodation was increased to seventy-seven, which provided about two thirds of the stokers needed to operate the ship.

In June 1900, Cobra made 34.89 knots on trials after which, her accommodation was modified to meet Admiralty requirements and she was finally accepted in September 1901.

On the afternoon of 17th September 1901 HMS Cobra sailed from the Tyne bound for Portsmouth on her first Royal Navy voyage, on board were senior engineers from the Admiralty, the builders, and Parsons. Very heavy weather was encountered soon after passing Flamborough Head and the rolling became so bad that it was almost impossible to work the stokeholds and speed reduced to ten knots. The next day 18 September 1901 at 7.30 am she suddenly without any warning broke in two and sank.

The court martial and enquiry reports held on the 10 October 1901 remained secret for 50 years, preventing outside experts examining the detailed evidence. In more recent times another enquiry was held in 1973 and an alternative explanation of the sinking to that produced by the court-martial has been proposed, that HMS Cobra struck timber floating in the water, first causing the denting to the keel plate, but then striking again further back along the ship at a weaker point in the bottom plating, creating a hole. As this ship has now been located by Shipwrecks of the River Humber, it is important to get all the photographic evidence and an archaeological survey of both sites, The bow section has now broken up with the artifacts scattered over the seabed. The remains lie outside of UK territorial waters which means Historic England cannot put a protection notice on it, we are trying to get a protection order from the Ministry of Defence who are concerned about the two wreck sites disappearing again. We need to try to find out the cause of the sinking and the loss of sixty-four men, including sixteen from the engine manufacturer Parsons, which was twenty five percent of their workforce including their works manager.

First Dive 16 September 2021 Humber Heritage dive boat travelled the forty miles to the area we were going to search, this was because our new research had uncovered a mistake in the court martial records, and we had not searched here before.

We arrived and started to scan the area and soon found debris and then the shape of a wreck, we marked the site with a buoy and tried to anchor the wreckage, this took time but eventually the anchor took hold.

Kevin Smith was the first diver down and soon discovered that the twenty odd years of searching had been worth it, unfortunately the visibility was not great but soon the wreck came into view the unmistakable unique stern of HMS Cobra with its four propellor shafts on A frames and three propellers per shaft ( unfortunately the shafts have been broken off very close to the hull leaving only two propellers on two shafts) this must have happened as she broke in two and the stern and bows lifted up and came together like a hinge, then the stern went down colliding with the seabed propellers first. The wreck is upside down and in exceptionally good condition considering she has laid there for one hundred and twenty years. She must have covered by sand and recently exposed by shifting sands. Now another mystery? why are the propellers not bronze, she was constructed by Armstrong Whitworth to meet Royal Navy specifications and in the builders' specs she has bronze propellers. The

hull shows signs of a significant impact with the seabed as where the frames are fitted inside the hull plating has buckled around each frame, and the front part of the hull's keel where she broke in two has been bent right under making it look like the bows.

Second Dive 24 May 2022 Humber Heritage dive boat travelled the forty miles to the area we were going to search, this was because our new research had found out that the bow section had stayed afloat for two days.

The area where the bows should have been, had been searched before and found nothing, but this time armed with more information and better survey equipment we soon found wreckage.

Gary Bexon was first diver down, followed by Kevin Smith and the pair were confronted by almost zero visibility, but they managed to confirm that this was the bow section of a ship. The wreckage was broken up and scattered all over the seabed and exceedingly difficult to make out what was there, but boilers and other artifacts and our newfound information, we can positively conclude that this is the bow section of HMS Cobra.

This section of the ship is 2.5 miles from the stern.

We cannot give any positions for this wreck sites as ongoing negotiations with the MOD are still active.

We hope to be able to continue our diving on these two sites in and give you an update towards the end of 2023.

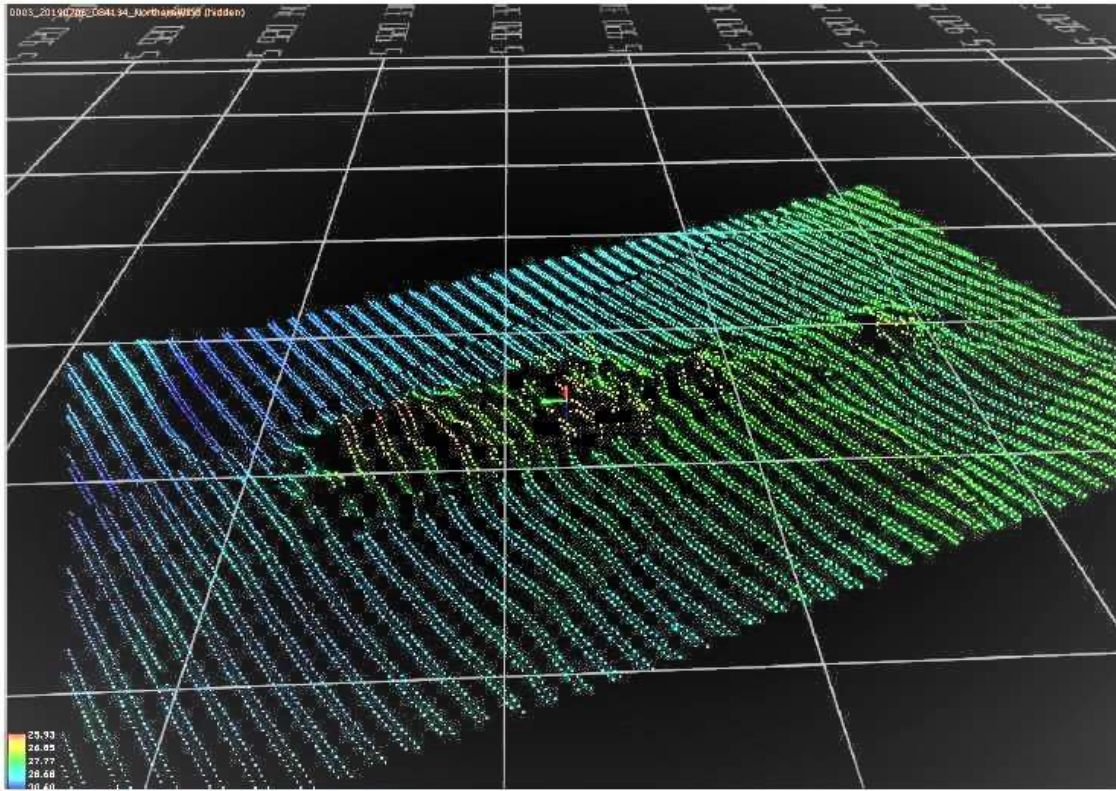
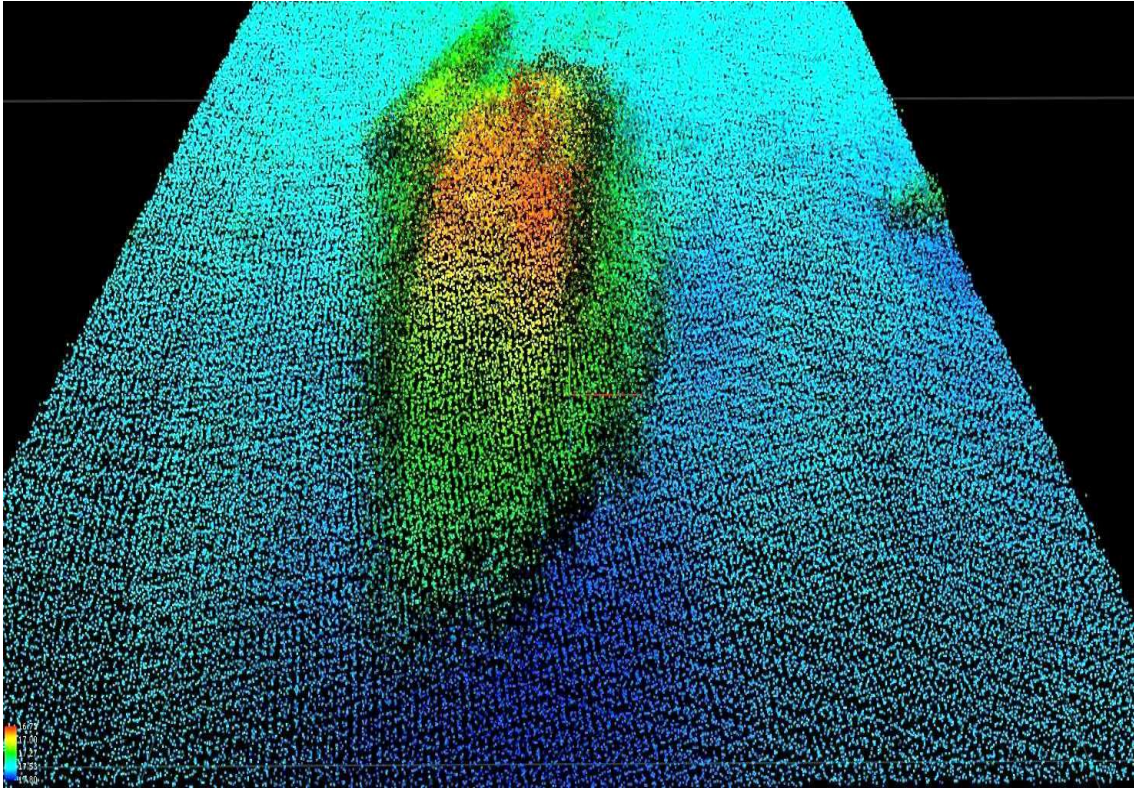
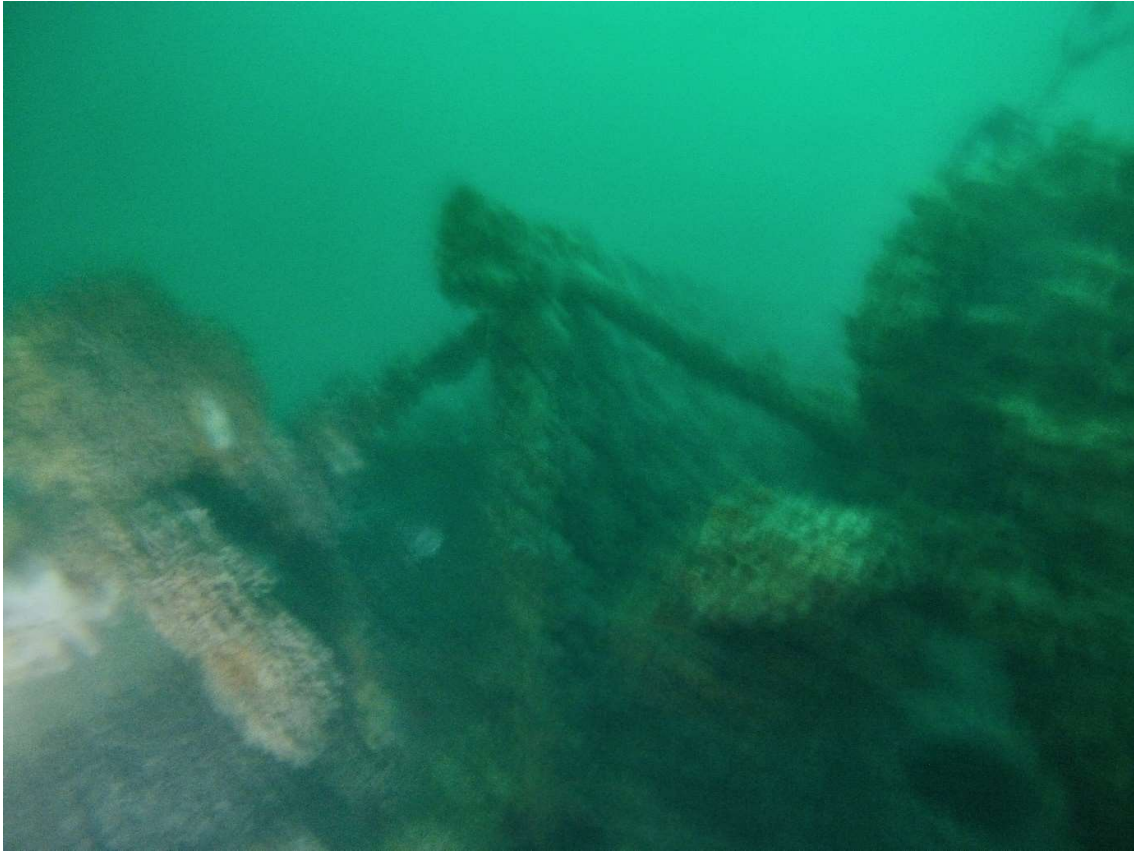


Figure 2. Depth image of the suggested mesh

This is a sonar image of the Bow section.



This is a sonar image of the stern section



This is one of the A frames that carry the propellor shaft and three propellers on each shaft, no props on this shaft but one on each of the other shafts on the left and right of this picture.



Heavily encrusted propellor showing its not bronze.